

subject. One word of caution: the maps, which are small and blurry, and were no better in the first edition, are worse than useless. Seton's photographs are a loss, but a small one, for he was operating in the days before the telephoto lens, and we have become habituated to seeing rather more dramatic shots. **Robert H. MacDonald** teaches in the Department of English at Carleton University.

DEALING WITH DIABETES

Don't call me Sugar Baby!, Dorothy Joan Harris. Scholastic-TAB Publications Ltd., 1983. 152 pp. \$2.25 paper. ISBN 0-590-71173-3.

Dorothy Joan Harris is the author of three books for younger children, *The house mouse*, *The school mouse*, and *The school mouse and the hamster*. *Don't call me Sugar Baby!* is Ms. Harris's first novel for pre-teen and early teenage readers: children between the ages of ten and fourteen.

This novel gives an account of a few months in the life of a Canadian twelve-year-old who is diagnosed as a diabetic. Alison Cooper, the twelve-year-old in question, finds it difficult to accept the failure of her parents' marriage and their separation. Like many adolescent girls she is preoccupied with her physical appearance, make-up, clothes, and with the awkwardness of understanding boys or establishing friendships with them. These problems are increased by the physical discomfort and general irritability which Alison experiences with the onset of the as-yet — undiagnosed diabetes. Alison's reactions to the news that she has diabetes range from an initial hostile rejection of the facts, through anger, to self-pity and apathy about her life. She becomes aware of her own mortality. As she remarks, "And if some grown-ups want to argue that nobody's childhood comes to an end when they're only twelve, well all I can say is, sometimes it does."

During the course of the novel the reader, through Alison, her family and her friends, learns a lot about diabetes. As Alison learns that she will have to test her urine four times a day, inject herself with insulin every day for the rest of her life, and pay close attention to her diet which is, of course, to exclude such favourite treats as cola, the reader finds it easy to sympathize with her anger and self-pity.

The reactions of Alison's family and friends are varied: her grandmother treats her as though she is made of glass; her father is afraid of illness and hospitals and feels incompetent to deal with a child he sees as an invalid; some of her classmates believe that diabetes is contagious and avoid contact with her, while a few are understanding, supportive and helpful. Gradually Alison comes to accept her condition and in spite of a few set-backs, decides that she "always would be diabetic. I had to accept that; it would never change. But

I could cope with it. I could still do anything I wanted to do. Life was definitely worth living. Definitely." Alison finds that the maturity required to deal with her illness can also help with other aspects of her life; she is able to go forward with a new confidence in herself.

As a background to Alison's story Dorothy Joan Harris has given us an assortment of stereotyped characters from contemporary Canadian society. At Alison's school, Hillcrest Junior High, we encounter the "strict" English teacher, Mrs. Faulks who, shades of yesteryear, is "crazy about grammar" and Ms. Scovell the gym teacher who "has a lot of modern ideas — like using Ms. for example." Alison has noticed "that gym teachers often seem to be modern types." As proof of this assertion Alison points to the boys' gym teacher who "has a big Fu Manchu moustache and almost never wears a tie."

At the hospital Alison meets the efficient nurse Miss Ransome and Dr. Dorian, the specialist in diabetes. Here we have another hint of feminism. When Dr. Dorian is introduced Alison remarks, "Dr. Dorian? But — you're a woman." Dr. Dorian replies, "Well! . . . I expect that sort of remark from some of my older patients. But you don't look like a chauvinist. Don't you think a woman can be a doctor?" This reminds us of Ms. Scovell who advises the girls in her gym class that they don't have to change their names when they marry. The author has touched base with feminism but in a rather superficial way.

The single-parent family is also now a commonplace of our society and Dorothy Joan Harris places Alison in such a family. The characterization of Alison's mother is fuller than that of most of the book's secondary characters. The strain that Mrs. Cooper is under is convincingly depicted; we get a real sense of the weight of responsibility which falls on a single parent — in this case a woman. Alison's father is also well portrayed in the novel. He calls Alison his sugar baby — an endearment that has little charm for Alison when she realises that she is diabetic — hence the novel's title. Mr. Cooper is a jovial man whose fear of hospitals and needles is symptomatic of his weakness and irresponsibility. When Alison attempts to practise injecting insulin, her father tells her to put the syringe away because he can't stand to see it. Later he is reluctant to allow Alison to visit him because he does not want to accept responsibility for her supervision. The relationship between Alison's parents and the arguments that take place between them about coping with Alison's condition are convincingly rendered.

Don't call me Sugar Baby! succeeds in its attempt to inform the reader about diabetes and about the difficulties a child might have in adjusting to such a condition. It could be a useful basis for a classroom discussion of these and related topics. As a work of fiction it is less successful. The two thirteen-year-olds who read the novel with me complained that the minor characters were too stereotyped and that some of the children in the novel — age twelve and up — were too childish to be credible. They felt that while the topic is worthy they would not have read the novel of their own volition. The book was obviously

carefully planned. The variety of ethnic backgrounds of the characters, the mild feminism, the delineation of the single-parent family, all indicate careful work, as does the information on diabetes. The problem for me is that the work is too calculated. It lacks sparkle and excitement on one hand and depth on the other — the sugar that would have helped the medicine go down for those ten — to fourteen-year-old readers.

Gillian Ferns lives in Dundas, Ontario. She is the mother of three children. A graduate of the University of Western Ontario, she is active in Home and School and other volunteer organizations.

PETS FOR THE YOUNG, THE MIDDLE-AGED, AND THE WHIMSICAL OLD

Mustard, Betty Waterton. Illus. by Barb Reid. Scholastic-TAB, 1983. 38pp. \$2.40 paper. ISBN 0-590-71175-X. *Chester's barn*, Lindee Climo. Tundra, 1982. 32pp. \$12.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88776-132-1. *Pigs: a troughful of treasures*. Sarah Bowman & Lucinda Vardey. Wiley, 1981. 144 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-471-79881-9.

Lately it's been reported that the care and companionship of pets have great therapeutic value for the aged. And children, we already knew, have great and requited love for animals. That leaves the rest of us in-betweeners, the great middle-aged, as the only constituency still to be heard from, the only constituency capable of an unsentimental assessment of the state of the animal kingdom.

If we hold to that categorization, for the moment, then these three books, in spirit at least, fall (with much qualification, exception-taking, and unseemly pushing and shoving) one in each camp.

Youngest at heart is *Mustard* (5 3/4" x 8") because both the child in the story as well as the aging Miss Goldfinch have a spontaneous, no-questions-asked, instinctive attraction to dogs — seven puppies — and one kitten. The reader is pulled along by the hook of ongoing narrative, wondering whether *Mustard*, the story's shaggy dog with big feet and strong affinities for knocking over flowers and uprooting carrots, will ever settle down in civilized fashion.

In the process, the author restrains herself admirably from over-explaining. Witness the deft discrimination between the breakfast "dished up in six soup bowls" for each of the other puppies and in "a lasagna pan for *Mustard*, who spilled a lot." Or, there's this dog's-eye view included in a report of *Mustard* on a tear: "She pulled apart a mop and shook it until it was quite dead."

"Great Galaxies," as Miss Goldfinch is wont to say, here is a children's author (from Vancouver, author of *Salmon for Simon*, 1978, and *Petranella*, 1980) who has faith in her reader's intelligence.

Chester's barn (11" x 8 1/2") sports more of a middle-aged feeling, and intelli-